

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

When Washington, D.C. Had Two Veterinary Colleges

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In 1927, after 35 years of operation and having educated almost 500 veterinarians, the United States College of Veterinary Surgeons at 222 C Street Northwest in Washington, DC, shut its doors forever. “The passing of the horse sounded the death knell of the veterinary profession,” was the opening line of the June 16, 1927, article as *The Washington Post* reported the closure that had been announced the night previously at the college’s last commencement. Only four students graduated in that final class.¹

A second Washington, DC, veterinary college was established in 1892 by Daniel E. Salmon, who was director of the Bureau of Animal Industries at the time. The National Veterinary College became part of Columbian University, which was renamed George Washington University in 1904.

Both of these veterinary colleges had the important responsibility to train veterinarians who would treat and eradicate diseases of livestock, like hog cholera and pleuropneumonia in cattle, as well as control diseases that spread from animals to humans, such as tuberculosis and Salmonellosis.

The veterinary care of pets was also growing in importance, as evidenced by the two-story dog hospital constructed at George Washington University in 1908. The state-of-the-art concrete and brick building had modern hot water heating and was large enough to accommodate 75 small animals.

Though the emerging fields of hygiene and food inspection were of great importance to the federal government, and the medical care of household pets was increasing in value to the public, the veterinarians’ chief responsibility remained the hundreds of thousands of horses in the major cities.

As the horse was replaced by the automobile and other internal combustion conveyances, the city-based veterinary colleges in New York, Boston, Kansas City, Chicago, and other cities had all closed by 1927. All that is, except at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where the veterinary school survived and is one of the present day Legacy² colleges.

Education of veterinarians continued in rural America at land grant universities where, by 1916, veterinary colleges had been established in towns and small cities from the state of Washington in the west, to New York in the east, and as far south as Texas and Alabama.

Unfortunately, the loss of the veterinary profession's urban footprint and its close affiliation with some of the major medical schools of the era such as at George Washington University, compromised the profession's ability to reach its full potential in both animal and human health.

¹ The Washington Post. [Veterinary College Here Has Last Commencement](#). 1927, Jun 16.

² Smith, Donald F. Suggested Categories for US Veterinary Colleges. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. August 13, 2013.

KEYWORDS:

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TOPIC:

Veterinary Colleges in the United States

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary

Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.